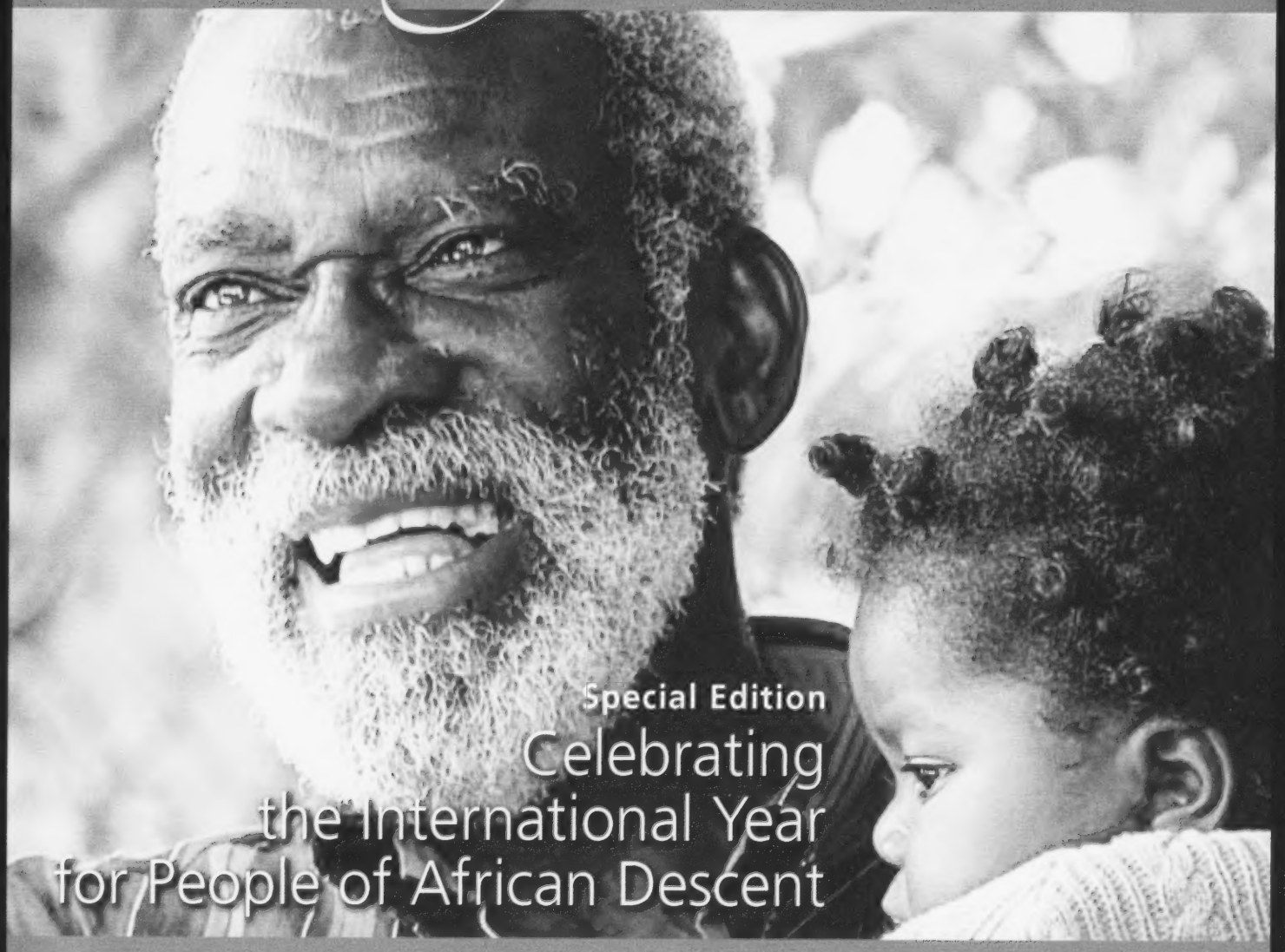
ONTARIO HERITAGE TRUST

An agency of the Government of Ontario

Heritage Matters

A publication of the Ontario Heritage Trust November 2011



Special Edition

Celebrating the International Year for People of African Descent

In this issue:

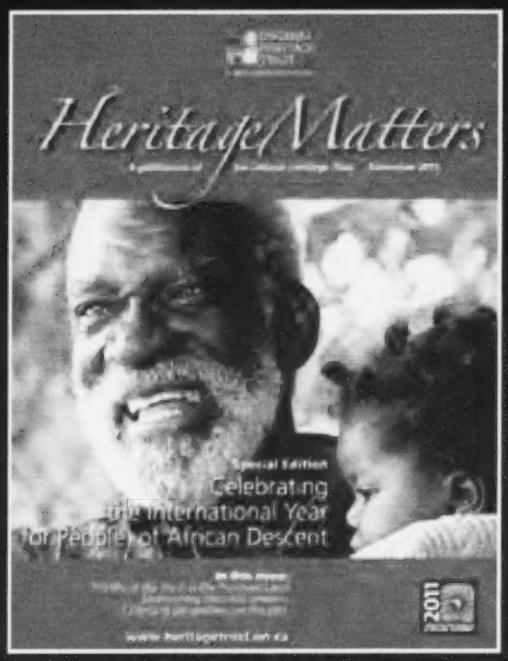
The life of the mind in the Promised Land
Overcoming historical amnesia
Changing perspectives on the past

www.heritagetrust.on.ca

2011 INTERNATIONAL YEAR FOR PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT

Feature story

Celebrating the International Year for People of African Descent, Pages 2-3



Heritage Matters

ONTARIO HERITAGE TRUST

Heritage Matters is published in English and French and has a combined circulation of 9,200. Digital copies are available on our website at www.heritagetrust.on.ca.

Advertising rates:

Black and white
Business card – $125 plus HST
¼ page – $250 plus HST

Inserts – Call to inquire about our exceptional rates.

For information, contact:

Ontario Heritage Trust
10 Adelaide Street East, Suite 302
Toronto, Ontario
M5C 1J3
Telephone: 416-325-5015
Fax: 416-314-0744
Email: marketing@heritagetrust.on.ca
Website: www.heritagetrust.on.ca

© Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2011
© Ontario Heritage Trust, 2011
Photos © Ontario Heritage Trust, 2011, unless otherwise indicated.

Produced by the Ontario Heritage Trust (an agency of the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Culture).

Editor: Gordon Pim
Guest Editor: Dr. Afua Cooper
Graphic Designer: Manuel Oliveira

This publication is printed on recycled paper using vegetable oil-based inks. Help us protect our environment by passing along or recycling this publication when you have no further need for it.

Aussi disponible en français.

The inclusion of any advertisement or insert in this publication does not imply or constitute an endorsement or acceptance by the Province of Ontario of any of the advertisers, products or services advertised. The Ontario Heritage Trust is not responsible for errors, omissions or misrepresentations contained in any advertisement or insert.

E&OE

ISSN 1198-2454 (Print)
ISSN 1911-446X (PDF/Online)

11/11

Ontario

CONTENTS

Greetings ____ 1
Feature story: Celebrating the International Year for People of African Descent ____ 2
The life of the mind in the Promised Land ____ 4
Len Gibson: Ontario dance pioneer ____ 5
A tribute to Dudley Laws ____ 6
Looking beyond the law ____ 8
The journey of the Africentric Alternative School ____ 8
Recognition, justice and development ____ 9
Overcoming historical amnesia: Recognizing people of African descent as pioneers and community builders ____ 10
The UNESCO Slave Route Project: Itineraries of African-Canadian memory ____ 12
Wilma Morrison: A life of activism ____ 13
Changing perspectives on the past ____ 14
Black heritage resources ____ 16

Cover image: Celebrating Emancipation Day at Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site in Dresden (Photo: Keith Blackwell Photography)

The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the Ontario Heritage Trust or the Government of Ontario.

A message from the Chairman

Heritage is as much about the future as it is about the past. An understanding of the past helps us to build a better future.

This year has been designated by the United Nations as the International Year for People of African Descent. While we can use this time to celebrate the province's Black heritage, it must also be a time to reflect on its significance. Ontario is home to a large and long-established community of African descent whose members have made, over many generations, an immense contribution to the life and development of this province.

The stories in this Special Edition of Heritage Matters illustrate the broad character of Ontario's Black heritage. They teach us about the many ways in which the Black community has played a substantial part in building and shaping the social, cultural, political and economic fabric of this province. They provide us with a greater knowledge and appreciation of the ways in which people of African descent have contributed to the narrative of Ontario. They enrich our understanding of this province and of the important place of the Black community within it.

We should also take this opportunity to salute the active role played by Canadians of African heritage, again and again, in the defence of Canada and, by extension, in the preservation of our shared history and institutions.

The long-standing contributions of the many community leaders and members of the Black Heritage Network of sites and organizations, who have done so much to safeguard this important history, are also deserving of our recognition. I would encourage you to visit www.heritagetrust.on.ca/slaverytofreedom to learn more about the network.

Join me as we acknowledge this important year. Together, we can celebrate and broaden our understanding of the significant role of the Black community in telling Ontario's stories.

Tom Symons

Thomas H.B. Symons, CC, O.Ont, FRSC, LLD

A message from the Honourable Jean Augustine

Friends,

The International Year for People of African Descent aims "to strengthen international, national and regional cooperation to benefit the people of African descent, and to recognize and promote their political, economic, social and cultural contributions from their diverse heritage and culture." In Ontario, we celebrate this diverse heritage and culture and take the theme of the year – recognition, justice and development – as a challenge to do more. We also recognize the need to address issues that still haunt the well-being of people of African descent.

Ontario has a rich history of the African-Canadian presence. Ours has always been a legacy of struggles and challenges, but strong leadership has always enabled us to turn challenges into opportunities.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of the Ontario Heritage Trust, the support of contributors to this issue, and to all Ontarians who are working to ensure that we have a diverse, inclusive society where people of African descent are respected and valued, and where they can be acknowledged as productive members of society.

I read somewhere that we will be known forever by the tracks we leave behind. As we focus on issues impacting people of African descent, Ontarians have the opportunity to leave their own "tracks" behind.

Jean Augustine, PC, CM, BA, M.Ed., LLD (Hon)

Jean Augustine was appointed as the first Fairness Commissioner for Ontario in March 2007. She was also the first African-Canadian woman to be elected to the House of Commons. She cares passionately about education and the challenges faced by newcomers to the province.

Celebrating the Interna of African Descent

The United Nations (UN) has designated 2011 as the International Year for People of African Descent. The UN recognizes that, worldwide, people of African heritage still face racial discrimination and oppression as a result of slavery and colonization.

In declaring the year's theme as "Recognition, Justice and Development," the UN has called on member states to take steps to redress this oppression. Responding to this call from the UN, the Ontario Heritage Trust has dedicated this issue of Heritage Matters to Ontario's 250-year African-Canadian heritage and history.

Ontario's Black heritage dates back to the period of the French regime. As early as 1745, Black oarsmen – enslaved and free – worked in the lucrative fur trade. We find evidence of these Black boatmen working in Toronto, Cataraqui (Kingston) and Niagara Falls.

This heritage was created and shaped by Black people from diverse origins and experiences. In addition to Blacks from the *ancien régime*, we have Loyalist military families who gained their freedom as a result of fighting for the British. There were also enslaved Africans who laboured for their white Loyalist owners. There were the 19th-century Underground Railroad immigrants from the United States. As the century progressed and the 20th century unfolded, Black people from the Caribbean began contributing to Ontario's Black history. And, after the Second World War, immigration from continental Africa increased.

Here are just a few of their stories. Born and raised in Senegal, West Africa, Richard Pierpoint was kidnapped and sold into the transatlantic slave trade, and ended up in the northern states. During the American Revolutionary War, he escaped from slavery and fought on the side of the British, later settling in Ontario; he also fought for the British during the War of 1812. Enslaved Ontario woman Chloe Cooley was an early human rights champion. Josiah Henson opened the first industrial and manual trades school in Canada. And, in more recent times, Jamaican-Canadian Rosemary Brown changed the Canadian political landscape when she became the first Black woman to run for the leadership of a federal party – the New Democratic Party – in 1972.

Black Ontarians throughout the past two and a half centuries have built communities, towns and cities, have raised families and have used their skills and talents for the development and progress of the province.

Though the accomplishments, contributions and achievements of Black Ontarians are legion, the history of Black people in Ontario has been underrecognized, marginalized or forgotten. And these were no mere accomplishments. Pierpoint, for example, helped found a new nation and country. Despite the tremendous gains African-Ontarians have made, racial discrimination continues to thwart our steps and has had a negative impact on the development of our communities.

For example, Senator Donald Oliver notes in the article "What it Means to be Black in Canada" (The Mark, July 14, 2011) that Blacks in Canada continue to face severe unemployment, racial profiling and discrimination in the courts. Further, Oliver notes that popular media continue to present Black Canadians in demeaning ways: as poverty stricken, pathological and criminal. Oliver further identifies the invisibility of Black history as one of the reasons that Black people continue to face various forms of racial discrimination.

According to the 2009 Statistics Canada police report on hate crimes, "Blacks continue to be victimized by hate crimes more than any other group." Hate crimes directed against Black Ontarians and Canadians have increased by 34 per cent since 2008 – particularly in Toronto, Ottawa and the Kitchener-Waterloo area.

Some of the leading authors and scholars of Ontario's Black experience – found here in this Special Edition of Heritage Matters – have responded to the call to make Black history visible and to use history as a tool to break down stereotypes and promote greater awareness of the province's Black past.

All the authors focus on one or all aspects of Black people as agents in the creation of their own history, and the need for recognition, justice and development for Black people. Rosemary Sadlier shows the role the Ontario Black History Society has played in ensuring that Black history be recognized and valued. Nina Reid-Maroney and Marie Carter both look at the accomplishments of some 19th-century Black Ontarians beyond the Underground Railroad narratives. Karolyn Smardz Frost informs us of another UN project and its relevance for African-Canadian heritage. Adrienne Shadd highlights the stellar role and work of community historian and griot

The Ontario Heritage Trust is proud to commemorate the International Year for People of African Descent.

2011 INTERNATIONAL YEAR FOR PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT

Ontario

Funded by the Government of Ontario

> "This International Year offers a unique opportunity to redouble our efforts to fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance that affect people of African descent everywhere."
> *Navi Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*

tional Year for People

By Dr. Afua Cooper

(storyteller) Wilma Morrison. Tamari Kitossa speaks to African-Canadians and the law, and how this law has been used as a double-edged sword in the lives of many Black Canadians. Afua Marcus reminds us that dance has always been an instrumental part of Black life by focusing on the life and work of Len Gibson. Mesfin Aman grounds us into the present by examining how civil rights leader Dudley Laws has changed the civil rights landscape in Ontario. And Thando Hyman explores the successes of the Africentric Alternative School and how this school has helped build pride among young Blacks.

Black Ontarians are aware that the arena of heritage, history and culture is a critical one in our struggle for our human rights. This issue of Heritage Matters is a step in that direction.

Scholar, historian and poet, Dr. Afua Cooper is the James Robinson Johnston Chair in Black Canadian Studies at Dalhousie University in Halifax. Her scholarly expertise includes slavery, abolition and Canada in the African Diaspora.

Illustration of Richard Pierpoint by Malcolm Jones, 1.E.2.4-CGR2 © Canadian War Museum

The life of the mind in the Promised Land

By Nina Reid-Maroney

The Henson family arrives on the Canadian shore the morning of October 28, 1830. Source: Uncle Tom's Story of His Life. An Autobiography of the Rev. Josiah Henson.

In the spring of 1861, a young black Philadelphian named Parker Theophilus Smith sold his belongings – including his extensive library of ethnography, history, mathematics, natural science, metaphysics, moral philosophy, ethics and logic – and moved his family to Dresden in then-Canada West. One of his first letters from his new home included an account of a public celebration at which the local superintendent of schools spoke on the subject of slavery.

When Parker Smith heard the largely Black abolitionist audience being advised to wait for a "white deliverer" to bring freedom to the enslaved, he responded with a history lesson: "I wonder what white people ever waited until God sent them a deliverer to rescue them from slavery. What did the Angles, the Saxons, the Danes, the Franks and the Normans do when the Roman Empire encroached upon their territories?" Smith's response to racial prejudice was formed in the intellectual world of Black Philadelphia, but it found a swift application in the complex ideological terrain of the Promised Land.

These brief lines from Smith's correspondence offer an eloquent reminder that migration to 19th-century Canada meant not only the movement of people, but the movement of ideas. Smith's letters show us particular and clearly delineated threads in a vast web of connection that reached across national borders and ran throughout the conceptual structures of the "Black Atlantic."

I think of Smith's traversing of this landscape as an intellectual migration – a term meant to dwell on the purposeful agency of ordinary people who believed that, in the face of oppression and sweeping historical forces that they could not control, ideas mattered. One hundred and fifty years later, the example of one Philadelphia shopkeeper of modest means provides compelling reasons for historians of the African-Canadian experience to focus new attention on the life of the mind.

Nina Reid-Maroney is a professor of history at the University of Western Ontario. Her specialties are intellectual history of Black freedom seekers and gender studies.

Len Gibson: Ontario dance pioneer

By P. Afua Marcus

Photo: Union of British Columbia Performers Archives

In this year declared by the United Nations as the International Year for People of African Descent, I think about dance in African Diaspora communities. This art form is one of the important cultural posts that plays a healthy role in the spiritual and physical lives of African-Canadian communities in Ontario.

The late Len Gibson was a contemporary dance pioneer who came to Toronto and encouraged the present African-Canadian dance community that exists in this province to stake their presence in the Canadian dance world. Gibson's work ethic enabled the dance community who studied with him to envision a career in dance. Noted members of the African-Canadian dance community who were students of Len Gibson included: Debbie Costello, Len Henry, Dr. Shani Williams and Vivine Scarlett.

Leornard "Len" W. Gibson was born on November 13, 1926 in Athabasca, Alberta. His family later settled in British Columbia. His parents arrived in Canada from the southern United States and the Caribbean. By the age of five, Gibson – a self-taught tap dancer – was performing in local shows in Vancouver, along with his sister Thelma. By the time Gibson was 19, he started studies on scholarship with Katherine Dunham in New York and later became a member of Dunham's resident company. There, he was introduced to Afro-Cuban style and took courses in tap, jazz, Spanish, oriental percussion, costume and visual design.

He trained with Jose Limon and Syvilla Fort, among other noted dance pioneers. In the 1960s, Gibson toured Europe, performing as an actor, singer, dancer and choreographer. He was also a principal dancer with Vancouver's Theatre Under the Stars, where he wrote and choreographed Bamboula, a double-first – the first musical to be produced for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) from Vancouver and the first interracial cast in North America. This production predated any interracial cast work done by American artists.

When Gibson settled in Toronto, he opened The Studio of Dance Theatre Arts. He later taught at the Yorkville Performing Arts Studio. Gibson accumulated credits as a performer, director and choreographer in film, television and radio on productions such as Fiddler on the Roof, West Side Story, Guys and Dolls, Hello Dolly, Finian's Rainbow and Salome Bey's Indigo.

His contribution to the Toronto dance community was noted and documented for over 30 years. When Gibson left Toronto, he returned to Vancouver where he continued to work in dance, theatre and television until his death in 2010. He received the 2000 Harry Jerome Award for Lifetime Achievement in the arts. He also received an Award of Distinction and the Black Dancers in Canada award. Gibson is remembered as a dance pioneer and a serious purveyor of the craft.

P. Afua Marcus is a dancer, a teacher of African and African Diasporic dance forms, an actor, a community developer and social activist. She is currently writing a history of Black dance in Canada.

The late Len Gibson was a contemporary dance pioneer who came to Toronto and helped enable the present African-Canadian dance community that exists in this province to stake their presence in the Canadian dance world.

A tribute to Dudley Laws

By Mesfin Aman

In February 2011, Dudley Laws checked himself out of hospital against medical opinion to honour a commitment previously made to inmates at Joyceville Institution in Kingston, Ontario to participate in Black History Month celebrations. The following month, on the evening of March 23, Laws summoned a small cadre of community activists chiefly from the Black Action Defense Committee (BADC) to his hospital bedside for an urgent meeting.

Although terminally ill, Laws continued to address agenda items that he deemed unresolved. These two examples were fitting testaments of selflessness, an unwavering commitment and a steely discipline in the service of African people for over 50 years – from England to Canada. It became apparent to all in attendance on March 23 that, on being given assurances that the work was indeed carrying on, Laws was able to relent his physical struggle and, four hours later, died, leaving the Black community with a tremendous void.

Who then was Dudley Laws? From a practical perspective, he was a welder, a man of humble beginnings, the son of Ezekiel and Agatha Laws, hailing from Saint Thomas parish in Jamaica. He shared this birthplace with Paul Bogle, the Baptist deacon and national hero who fearlessly led ex-slaves on a march into Spanish Town in 1865 to present their discontent with the injustices of the colony.

Any attempt to write the history of Dudley Laws must include the history of the BADC. Although Laws was the charismatic and courageous leader of the organization, BADC has always been comprised of progressive elements of the African-Canadian community spanning generations, nationalities, gender and class. These elements helped to shape Law's legacy by practising the concept of the extended family.

There is a misconception that Laws and the BADC were singularly focused on issues of anti-Black racism. An accurate representation of history, however, will show several campaigns in coalition with the South Asian community, the Sikh community, the Filipino community, the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, the

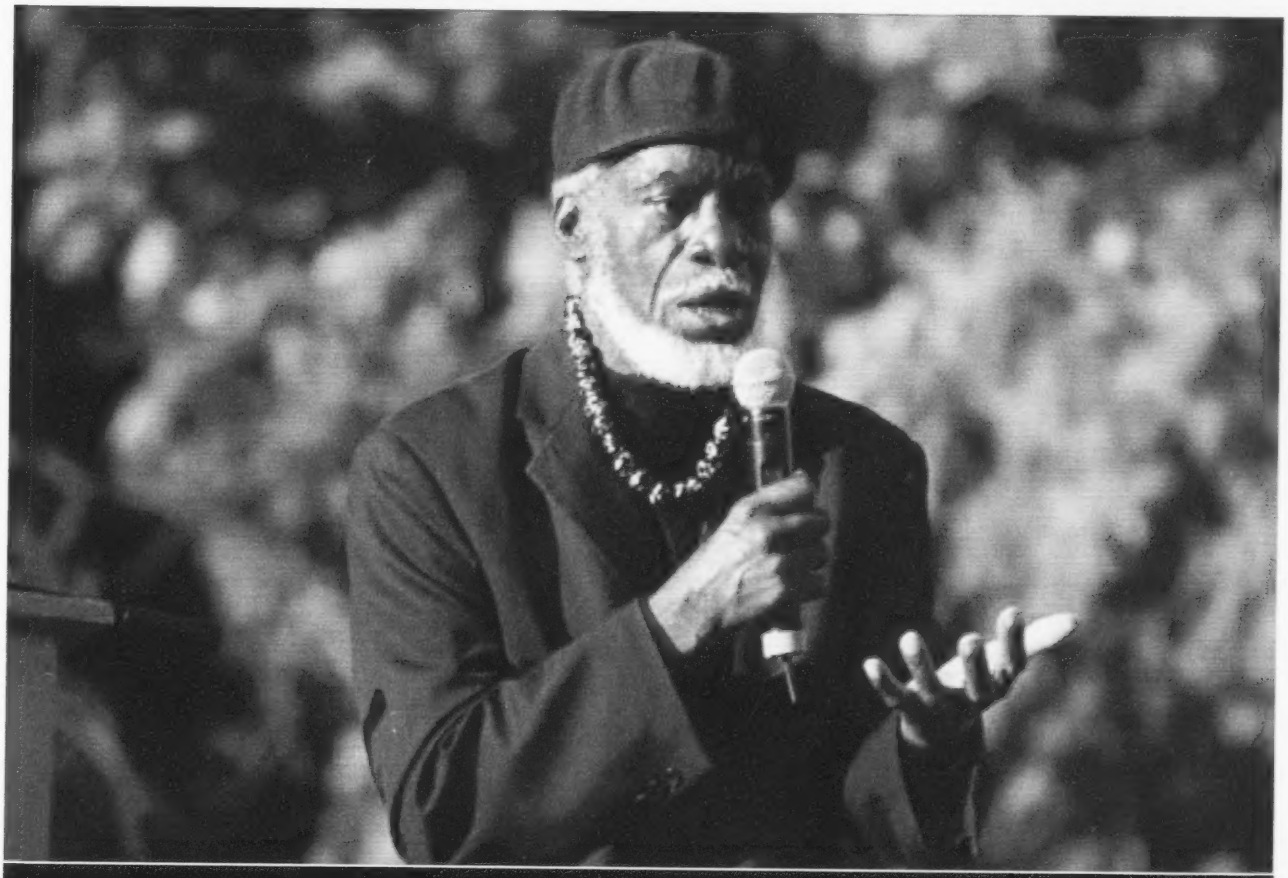


Photo: Mesfin Aman

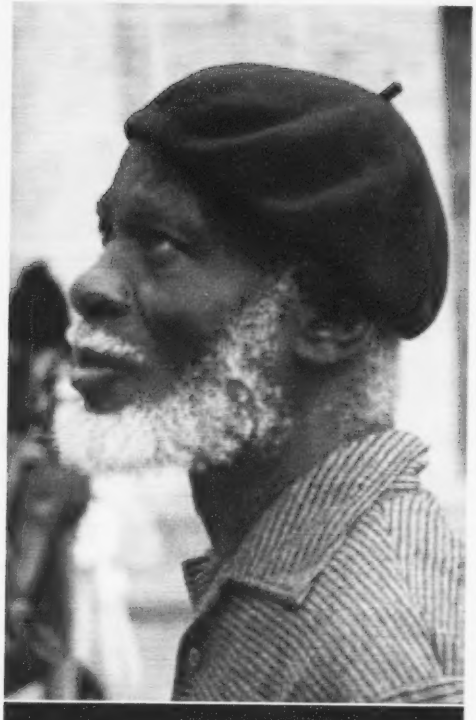


Photo: Mesfin Aman

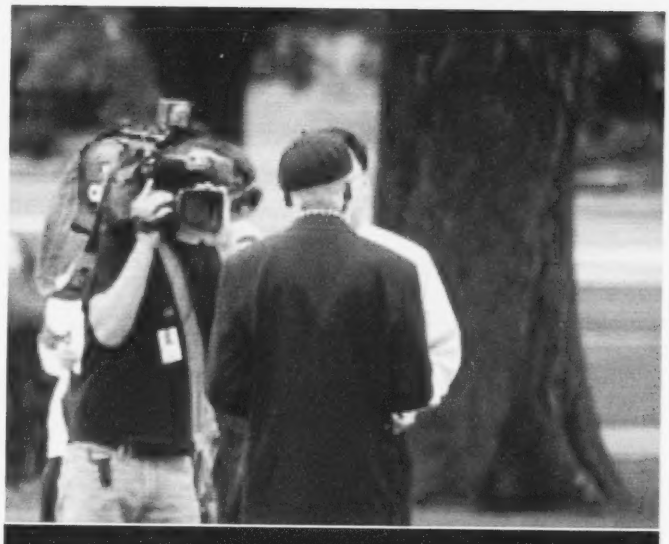


Photo: Mesfin Aman

Toronto Coalition Against Racism, First Nations and advocacy on behalf of many non-Black victims of police actions. Dudley Laws lived the political dictum of Martin Luther King Jr., who stated that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Laws had an excellent pulse of the community and was pragmatic in his approach to the myriad of problems that faced Black people. He recognized that times had changed, as had dynamics of community, and he was willing to work with new ideas, different people and in new ways. He was also open to working with all people – irrespective of age, ideological persuasion, dogma or cultural background – as long as the effort was sincere and about the inspiration of oppressed people.

It is also important to note that Dudley Laws cannot be defined solely by his political advocacy. He was also a keeper of culture and a man of song, poetry and dance. He could croon to the sounds of Louis Armstrong or Nat King Cole. He could go tête-à-tête against Renaissance men such as Milton Blake or Colin Kerr in reciting classical poetry and literature from memory. He could spar with his best friend Hewitt Loague to establish who had the smoothest moves and lightest feet on the dance floor in their sweet serenades of soul music. And, along with the late Jack Johnson, he played an important role in keeping alive the oral and social tradition of the wake. Rooted in Africa and the Caribbean, the wake is an important tradition that assists in the collective bere avement of loved ones by celebrating life, community and culture through ritual, food, drink and song.

In the final analysis, though, Dudley Laws and the BADC would triumph and be responsible for significant public policy reform, anti-racism legislation and the civilian overseeing of police agencies. More importantly, African-Canadians would be instilled with the necessary courage and belief that action and advocacy would bring about the necessary changes for equal rights and justice. This is the same premise in which 150 years ago the oppressed men and women of Morant Bay – the birthplace of Dudley Laws – would rise up to change the course of history for years to come.

Mesfin Aman is an educator, social activist and member of the Black Action Defence Committee.

Looking beyond the law

By Tamari Kitossa

This International Year goes beyond recognizing the contributions that African-descended people have made toward the economic, cultural and material enrichment of the West. It is also a call for an appraisal of racist actions that continue to impact African-descended peoples.

It is ironic that, at the height of the North Atlantic slave trade, Europeans pontificated on the rights of man while denying their extension to African people. Many people see this as an example of the law being manipulated against the African. Despite strokes of the pen to abolish the more overt expressions of exploitation, the law still needs to be reviewed to prevent similar abuses that could be seen to conceal a historic bias toward the African.

But is there any truth behind this bias? For example, the Ontario Commission on Systemic Racism identifies the war on drugs as the chief reason for the explosion of African-Canadian imprisonment in Ontario. There is no evidence, however, that African-Canadians use or sell drugs more than others. Additionally, while African-Canadians represent less than two per cent of the Canadian population, they comprise more than six per cent of federal inmates.

Legal systems must be constantly monitored and adjusted to meet the needs of an evolving society. Governments and an informed electorate must work together to overcome racial prejudice. The African struggle for justice can be seen as one against law itself. But, looking beyond the law, western societies must embrace a world where inequality – in all its guises – is banished.

Tamari Kitossa is an Associate Professor at Brock University in the Department of Sociology. His research areas include African-Canadians and the law, gender and justice, and sexuality and identities.

The journey of the Africentric Alternative School

By Thando Hyman

Former student Manani Jones (left) received the Most improved student award from Principal Hyman at the inaugural AAS gala in June 2010. Photo: Africentric Alternative School

As traditional approaches to education continued to negate, under-represent and marginalize the contributions of African-Canadians, vocal critics of the report entitled Toward a New Beginning – The Report and Action Plan of the Four-Level Government/African Canadian Community Working Group (1992) initiated a new pedagogy in education that took into account the history, culture and tradition of the students and made these experiences central in learning.

This approach was also viewed as an effective means of addressing the high dropout rate and achievement gap affecting students of African descent. Many parents were also seeking approaches that they were not afforded.

It is in this context that the Africentric Alternative School (AAS) opened its doors on September 8, 2009 at Sheppard Public School (a school with declining enrolment) offering classes from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 5. The AAS stated three key outcomes for its students: high academic achievement, high self-pride and a high motivation to succeed. To date, the school has enjoyed many successes.

The school has approximately 190 students today with a waitlist, and has expanded to Grade 7, increased to three full-day kindergarten classes and plans to increase capacity to Grade 8.

The integration of diverse perspectives, experiences and histories of African people into the provincially mandated curriculum has translated to academic successes. This includes the inaugural Grade 3 class exceeding the results of the Toronto District School Board and the province of Ontario, thus showing that alternate models and Africentric education can garner the desired results.

Lastly, the school has fostered a healthy community of students, staff, parents, volunteers and advocates, resulting in increased levels of partnerships and engagement in line with the African concept of "it takes a village to raise a child." The AAS continues to seek and develop more relevant and successful approaches to education that can be replicated in the larger society.

Thando Hyman is the principal at the Africentric Alternative School.

Recognition, justice and development

By Rosemary Sadlier

How do we recognize people of African descent in Ontario? How do we deal with their issues to provide them with justice? How do we facilitate and acknowledge their contributions to the development of our society? While the legacy of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade was racism, part of the challenge of the International Year for People of African Descent is creating the opportunities to raise awareness on an ongoing basis.

The Ontario Black History Society (OHBS) was formed to study, preserve and promote Black history and heritage. Since 1978, through the tireless efforts of this volunteer-run provincial heritage organization, a number of initiatives have been undertaken – from the creation of the first African-Canadian historical film, an oral history collection, resource centre, nominations of people/places and events for historic recognition, school presentations, free-standing exhibits and the most-accessed African-Canadian website, www.blackhistorysociety.ca.

In 1979, the OBHS successfully petitioned the City of Toronto for the first Black History Month proclamation. Clearly, this acknowledgement provides support for issues of recognition, justice and development. But there continue to be obstacles to overcome.

The OBHS has participated in several preparatory conferences for the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) and special consultations carried out by United Nations-appointed Independent Experts providing opportunities for various communities to share their experiences and offer suggestions for transformation. One of those experts, Gay McDougall, listed a number of areas requiring improvement in Canada. Among her points, she mentions the pervasive issue for African-descendant students who are learning through curriculum and textbooks that ignore their histories – a shortcoming that strips people of the story of themselves.

The OBHS is involved in a range of new initiatives to engage youth through the Africentric Resources being compiled for educators. Another OBHS project is the creation of a centre for African-Canadian culture and history to be a space that informs African-descendant students and other community members about the important legacy of our past and the hope of our tomorrow.

Rosemary Sadlier is the President of the Ontario Black History Society. Sadlier has used her position and commitment to Ontario's Black history to bring about changes pertaining to Black studies in school curricula and in the heritage community. She is also the author of several books on Black history.

OBHS
Ontario Black History Society

Overcoming historical amnesia:

Recognizing people of African descent as pioneers and community builders

By Marie Carter

Did you know? The British American Institute was a manual labour school established in 1841 through the efforts of J.C. Fuller, a Quaker from New York, Reverend Hiram Wilson, an agent for the American Anti-Slavery Society, and the Reverend Josiah Henson, a former slave. Henson and Wilson, on behalf of a board of directors, purchased 300 acres in Dawn Township at present-day Dresden to establish the school. A settlement formed around the school and came to be known as the Dawn Settlement. The Ontario Heritage Trust interprets this history at Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site.

Essential Canadian history often recognizes people of African descent solely through the heroic stories of the Underground Railroad. These stories alone, however, do not represent the diversity of African-Canadians and their contributions.

In 2003, in Dresden, Ontario, developers of the Trillium Trail Historical Walk rejected the idea that the accomplishments of early Black pioneers were confined to their stories of escape. It posed an important question. If the majority of the population in their early community were people of African descent, would some of them not have made contributions similar to those of white settlers in developing the townsite?

Answering this question has led to a radically different understanding of the Dawn Settlement area and its citizens. People of African descent who settled here emerged as diverse individuals, including enterprising former slaves who cleared land and introduced new crops such as tobacco and hemp, and skilled tradespeople. A large percentage were also freemen, including professionals, business owners, and an elite group of successful people who brought their considerable resources with them and invested it in the community. Families like the Whippers, Hollensworths, Hills, Shadds and Charitys had a significant impact on the Dawn Settlement and the emerging community of Dresden.

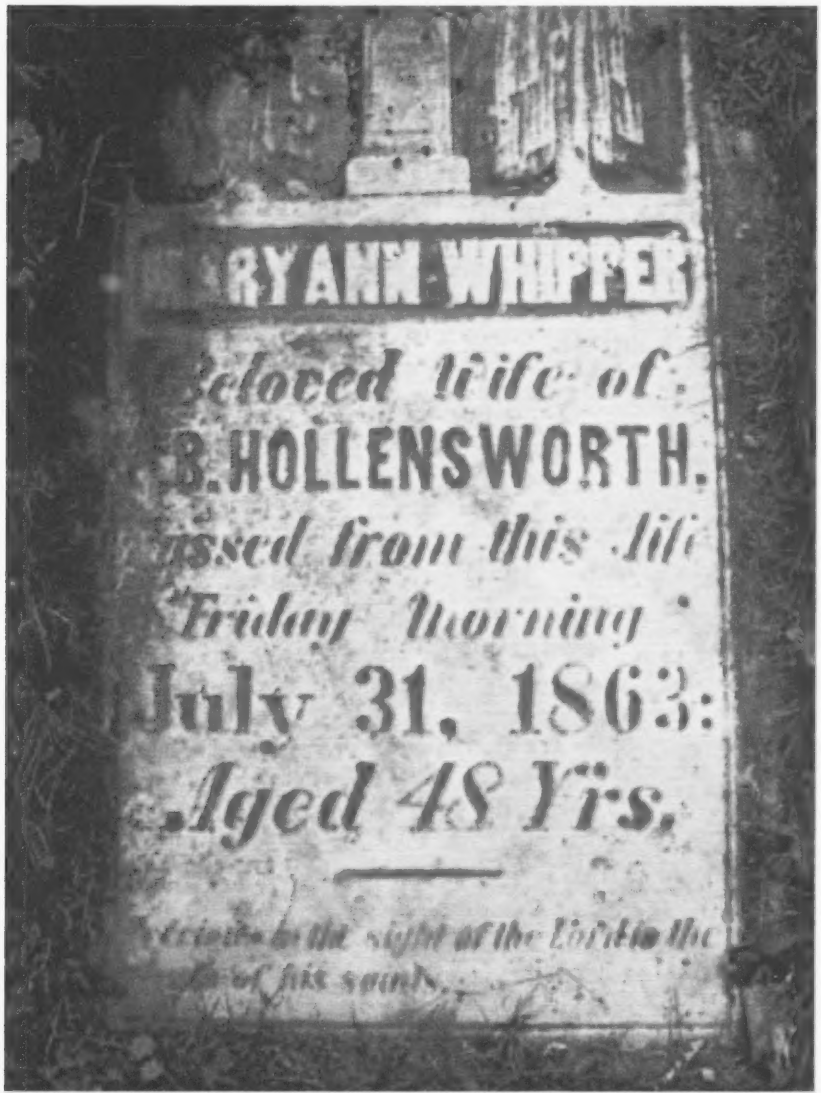
The extended family or business associates of prominent Underground Railroad operatives like William Whipper were concerned with developing an infrastructure that would assist those who had fled north in successfully building a new life – as well as supporting their own families, whom they had moved north for safety after the passage of the draconian 1850 Fugitive Slave Act in the United States. That infrastructure

included social institutions and professional services. From 1853 to 1873, their investments and presence injected new life into the Dawn Settlement. In 1854, the community had developed a flour mill, lumber mill, warehouse, an inn for travellers, a corn mill and various shops in Dresden. These individuals also included professionals who taught at schools and provided the community with a number of long unrecognized firsts, including the town's first doctor (Dr. Amos Aray) and first real estate agent (J.B. Hollensworth).

Pennsylvanian William Whipper owned the majority of the original townsite after 1853, and held the mortgages on a number of properties he sold, allowing others to make a start – including at least one early white industrialist who would later be credited as a town founder. Whipper and his associates, meanwhile, would pass into historical obscurity.

The community at Dresden is working to rectify this and other instances of historical amnesia by recognizing these early pioneers and community builders – and later civil rights activists – in a variety of historical projects.

Marie Carter is an independent historical researcher. She has done ground-breaking work in the history of African-Canadians who migrated to southwestern Ontario during the 19th century.



The Dresden Cemetery gravesite memorial of Mary Anne Whipper-Hollensworth – William Whipper's sister – is one of the rare pieces of physical evidence that remains of the community's connection to a group of well-to-do Pennsylvanians. (Photo: Marie Carter)

Did you know? In 2010, an Ontario Heritage Trust plaque was installed on the town's main street to commemorate Hugh Burnett and the National Unity Association whose activism at Dresden led to the creation of the Fair Employment Practices Act and the Fair Accommodation Practices Act in Ontario. New history projects continue to reflect the multicultural nature of the town's early history and development.

The UNESCO Slave Route Project: Itineraries of African-Canadian memory

By Karolyn Smardz Frost

Former Governor General Michaëlle Jean shares a moment with Dr. Afua Cooper (right) and her daughter Habiba Diallo (centre) at the Harriet Tubman Institute event on August 27, 2011.

In honour of the United Nations' designation of 2011 as the International Year for People of African Descent, the Harriet Tubman Institute for Research in the Global Migrations of African Peoples at York University has launched a major initiative to help raise public awareness about Ontario's and Canada's rich and deep African-Canadian heritage. The first partner to join in this exciting collaboration – between the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Harriet Tubman Institute and community groups, government agencies and heritage organizations – was the Ontario Heritage Trust.

The Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, former Governor General of Canada and now the UNESCO Special Envoy for Haiti, announced the UNESCO Slave Route Project: Itineraries of African Canadian Memory initiative on August 23, 2011 as part of the Harriet Tubman Institute's summer institute. This was the fourth Institut Interdisciplinaire Virtuel des Hautes Études sur les Esclavages et les Traites (IVHEET), and bore the theme of Slavery, Memory, Citizenship.

Itineraries of African Canadian Memory was launched to identify and designate places evocative of the African-Canadian experience as a UNESCO Itinerary of Memory. The initial focus is on historic sites in Ontario, including those associated with colonial-era slavery, and with the escape of thousands of enslaved African-Americans to Ontario on the fabled Underground Railroad. Eleven African-Canadian heritage sites commemorated by Ontario Heritage Trust provincial plaques were recognized by UNESCO at the International Scientific Committee meeting in Columbia in May 2011.

Later phases of the project will include partnering with institutions, communities and agencies across Canada to designate sites of African-Canadian memory on a national scale, and to link with similar itineraries around the globe.

The project is being developed by Dr. Paul Lovejoy, Canada Research Chair in African Diaspora History, Distinguished Research Professor at York University, and a longtime member of the UNESCO International Scientific Committee; Underground Railroad-era archaeologist and historian Dr. Karolyn Smardz Frost; and Hilary Dawson, genealogist, historian and heritage professional.

Karolyn Smardz Frost is a historian, university professor and author. Her specialties are historical memory, slavery and antislavery. Her most recent book, I've Got a Home in Gloryland: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad, won the Governor General's Award for non-fiction in 2007.

Wilma Morrison:

A life of activism

By Adrienne Shadd

Wilma Morrison received a Lieutenant Governor's Ontario Heritage Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2007 from the Ontario Heritage Trust, presented by The Honourable Lincoln M. Alexander (left) and The Honourable David C. Onley, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario.

By now, many people in the heritage community and the city of Niagara Falls, Ontario are familiar with the woman who is practically synonymous with Black history – Wilma Morrison. In recent years, she has been showered with awards and honours for her work in saving the R. Nathaniel Dett British Methodist Episcopal Chapel and establishing the Norval Johnson Memorial Library. In January 2011, she was one of 30 recipients of the Order of Ontario – the province's highest award for its citizens – for her efforts in ensuring that the pioneers of African descent be remembered and acknowledged.

Less well-known is that she was a civil rights activist before such a term was part of our everyday lexicon. Growing up in Hamilton, Morrison was a member of Stewart Memorial Church's youth group when, back in the 1940s, this group monitored local restaurants that had a reputation for denying service to Black customers. Confronted with a group of teens, the restaurants served them without incident; this activity paved the way for equal accommodation practices in the city's restaurants, clubs and dance halls. They also staged a one-day sit-in at the Alexandra skating rink when they were refused admittance there. Morrison insisted on meeting with the fire and police departments to ask why Blacks and other minorities were not hired. This got the ball rolling at the fire department and Blacks were eventually hired.

Morrison always wanted to be a teacher, but the normal schools at the time (today's teachers' colleges) did not admit Black students. It was a full-circle moment when she was bestowed an honorary doctorate from Brock University in June 2010.

As Canadians laud our role in welcoming fugitive slaves on the Underground Railroad, Wilma Morrison's inspiring story reminds us that Canada has its own history of racial ignorance and intolerance.

Adrienne Shadd is an author and historical researcher. Her specialties are women and gender, community history and migration. She has researched the history of Black immigrants to Ontario.

Changing perspectives on the past

By Sam Wesley

The Ontario Heritage Trust's provincial plaque program has existed for more than 50 years. Throughout this time, it has commemorated several people, places and events relating to Ontario's Black heritage. An examination of these plaques reveals that significant changes have occurred over time in the program's approach to Black heritage – changes that are reflected in altered terminology, redirected emphasis and a growing number of provincial plaques that commemorate Black heritage.

These shifts in approach to Black heritage – evident not only in the plaque program but in cultural, political, social and educational institutions throughout the province – have resulted from several often interconnected influences, including the civil rights movement, multiculturalism and post-colonialism. It is important to remember that greater Black heritage representation in plaques, and changes to the terminology used in plaque texts, are not ends in themselves, but are part of a wider process of reexamination.

Prior to the 1960s, the heritage landscape was dominated by the notion that a single overarching historical narrative could accurately and comprehensively explain who we were and where we came from. That single narrative was often both exclusionary (in that it overwhelmingly represented one dominant perspective) and inflexible (because history was viewed as something unalterable). There was a pervasive notion that things had either happened or not happened and could be described accurately or inaccurately. This imbued the historical narrative with claims to objectivity and authority that marginalized other perspectives – including those of Black Ontarians.

But, in recent decades, historians and scholars have peeled back the layers of these overarching historical narratives to reveal omissions, hierarchies, contradictions, distortions and motivations that operate within the narratives that were previously largely hidden or ignored. They have delved into the complicated anatomy of how histories, cultures and identities are constructed and have argued that the historical past is not something absolute and unalterable, but a sustained dialogue between past and present perspectives – in other words, an ongoing process.

International scholars such as Benedict Anderson, Edward Said, Arjun Appadurai and the Canadian, Charles Taylor, have emphasized the role of imagination in the construction of histories, identities and nationalities. This emphasis on imagination does not suggest that history is in any way make-believe or unreal, nor does it diminish the real impact that historical

A provincial plaque was unveiled on July 31, 2010 as part of the Emancipation Day event at Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site in Dresden to commemorate Hugh Burnett and the National Unity Association.

Dr. Anderson Ruffin Abbott (1837-1913).

On August 23, 2007, this provincial plaque was unveiled to commemorate Chloe Cooley and the 1793 Act to Limit Slavery in Upper Canada. The plaque was unveiled by The Honourable Lincoln M. Alexander, then-Chairman of the Ontario Heritage Trust.

events have had on people. Instead, it reminds us that the historical past is something that we, in the present, invoke and frame. We bring our collective and individual imaginations to bear on past events by creating context, envisioning connections, filling in gaps, describing history with current terminology and projecting our own thoughts and experiences onto it.

As individuals, communities and societies have a degree of agency that we bring to the process of history creation – agency that can be used to change, broaden and diversify that process. With this in mind, concerted efforts have been made to redress imbalances in the way our history has been perceived and to make room for multiple voices and experiences – including those that have been previously marginalized. Changing approaches to Black heritage, evident in the provincial plaque program and elsewhere, reflect this spirit of pluralism.

Together with community partners, the Provincial Plaque Program has helped, in recent years, to interpret a variety of voices from Ontario's Black history. These include the voice of Chloe Cooley – an enslaved woman whose cries, as she was violently forced into a boat on the Niagara River and sold to an American, so distressed some inhabitants of the province that Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe introduced the Act to Limit Slavery in Upper Canada in 1793; the voice of Dr. Anderson Ruffin Abbott – the first Canadian-born doctor of African descent and a president of the Wilberforce Educational Institute; the voices of Hugh Burnett and the tireless campaigners of the National Unity Association; The Provincial Freeman newspaper and the many voices therein that championed social reform; and the collective voices of the early settlers of Black communities in Puce River, Queen's Bush, Otterville and Hamilton.

The Provincial Plaque Program is uniquely positioned to respond to this shift identified in historiography. With more than 1,200 plaques throughout the province, the plaque program demonstrates that history is variegated. Plaques have proven to be a fitting medium through which to impart a diverse array of stories and experiences.

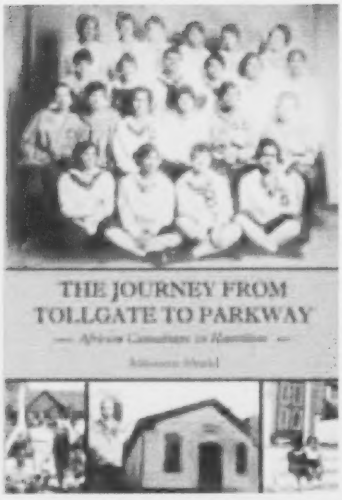
Explore the Trust's Online Plaque Guide at www.heritagetrust.on.ca/plaques. Or trace the perilous path of 19th-century Blacks as they fled to the sanctuary of the north along the silent tracks of the Underground Railroad by visiting www.heritagetrust.on.ca/slaverytofreedom.

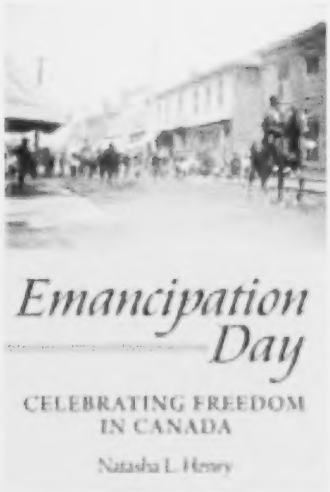
Furthermore, the plaque program is self-consciously part of a process by which historical memory is invoked, and its success is achieved through partnerships and consultation.

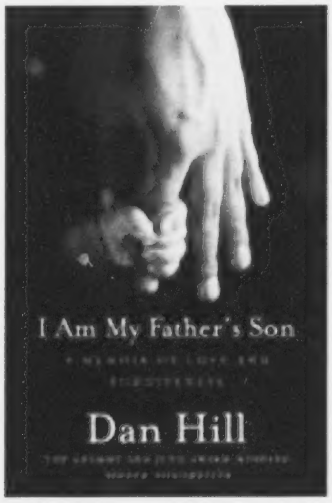
Community partners, Trust staff and external researchers all contribute to the creation of each plaque. Yet those who read these plaques bring to them their own meanings, experiences and interpretations. Voices from the present and the past interact and the dialogue continues.

Sam Wesley is the Acting Plaque Program Coordinator with the Ontario Heritage Trust.

Black heritage resources







The Journey from Tollgate to Parkway: African-Canadians in Hamilton
By Adrienne Shadd

Dundurn Press Ltd. 2010. When the Lincoln Alexander Parkway was named, it was a triumph not only for this distinguished Canadian, but for all African Canadians. It had indeed been a long journey from the days in the 1880s when a Black woman named Julia Berry operated one of the tollgates leading up to Hamilton Mountain. The Journey from Tollgate to Parkway examines the history of Blacks in the Hamilton-Wentworth area, from their status as slaves in Upper Canada to their settlement and development of community, their struggle for justice and equality, and their achievements, presented in a fascinating and meticulously researched historical narrative.

Emancipation Day: Celebrating Freedom in Canada
By Natasha L. Henry

Dundurn Press Ltd. 2010. This new, well-researched book provides insight into the creation, development and evolution of a distinct African-Canadian tradition through descriptive historical accounts and appealing images. The social, cultural, political and educational practices of Emancipation Day festivities across Canada are explored, with emphasis on Ontario, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec and British Columbia.

I Am My Father's Son: A Memoir of Love and Forgiveness
By Dan Hill

Harper Collins Publishers Limited, 2009. In this poignant, moving memoir, one of Canada's most respected singer-songwriters traces his difficult, often tumultuous relationship with his father. From the time Dan Hill picked up a guitar at age 11, he tried to win the approval of Daniel Hill Sr., a man who has been called Canada's father of human rights. But Hill Sr. set impossibly high standards for himself and his family, especially for his eldest son, leading to conflict and alienation even as young Dan achieved international fame.

My Name is Henry Bibb: A Story of Slavery and Freedom
By Afua Cooper

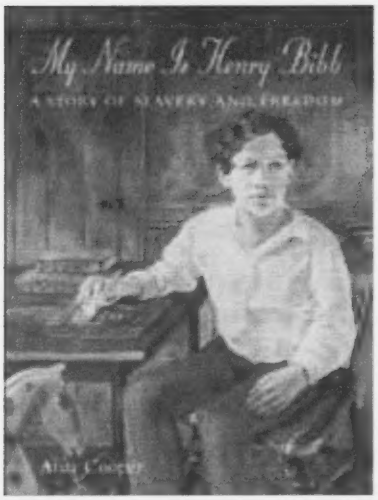
Kids Can Press, 2009. Often shocking, always compelling, Afua Cooper's novel is based on the life of Henry Bibb, an American slave who after repeated attempts escaped in 1841 to become an anti-slavery speaker, author and founder of a Black newspaper. Cooper takes painstakingly researched details about slavery and weaves an intimate story of Bibb's young life, which is overshadowed by inconceivable brutality.

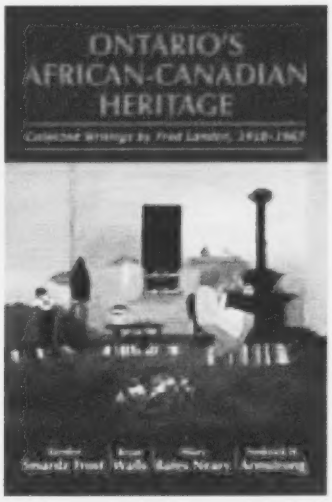
Ontario's African Canadian Heritage: Collected Writings by Fred Landon, 1918-1967
By Karolyn Smardz Frost, Bryan Walls, Hilary Bates Neary and Frederick H. Armstrong

Dundurn Press Ltd. 2009. Ontario's African-Canadian Heritage is composed of the collected works of Professor Fred Landon, who for more than 60 years wrote about African-Canadian history. The selected articles have, for the most part, never been surpassed by more recent research and offer a wealth of data on slavery, abolition, the Underground Railroad and more, providing unique insights into the abundance of African-Canadian heritage in Ontario. Though much of Landon's research was published in the Ontario Historical Society's journal, Ontario History, some of the articles reproduced here appeared in such prestigious US publications as the Journal of Negro History.

Harriet Tubman: Freedom Seeker, Freedom Leader
By Rosemary Sadlier

Dundurn Press Ltd. (A Quest Biography book), 2012. Tubman's exploits helped to empower those opposed to slavery and enrage those who supported it. Her success encouraged enslaved Africans to make the brave break for freedom and reinforced the belief held by abolitionists in the potential of black freedom and independence. Referred to as "General Tubman" due to her contributions to the Underground Railroad and to the Union Army, Tubman's numerous rescue missions ending in Canada helped to build the interest in escape and reinforce the position of Canada as the final stop on the journey to freedom.





Websites

Black History Canada Education Guide

www.blackhistorycanada.ca/education.php

This web resource enhances a student's knowledge and appreciation of the Black-Canadian experience through engaging discussion and interactive activities.

Black History Month Museum

www.cic.gc.ca/english/games/museum/flash/flash-game.asp

This educational initiative, developed by Citizenship and Immigration Canada in partnership with Black cultural institutions and historical sites across Canada, allows users to travel through different historical periods and events in an interactive manner.

Harriet Tubman Institute

http://harriet.tubman1.yorku.ca/news/welcome_to_the_international_year_for_people_of_african_descent

The Harriet Tubman Institute is campaigning to have Underground Railroad sites and other sites showcasing Africa's presence in Canada recognized and designated by UNESCO's "Itinerary of Memory" program.

Slavery to Freedom

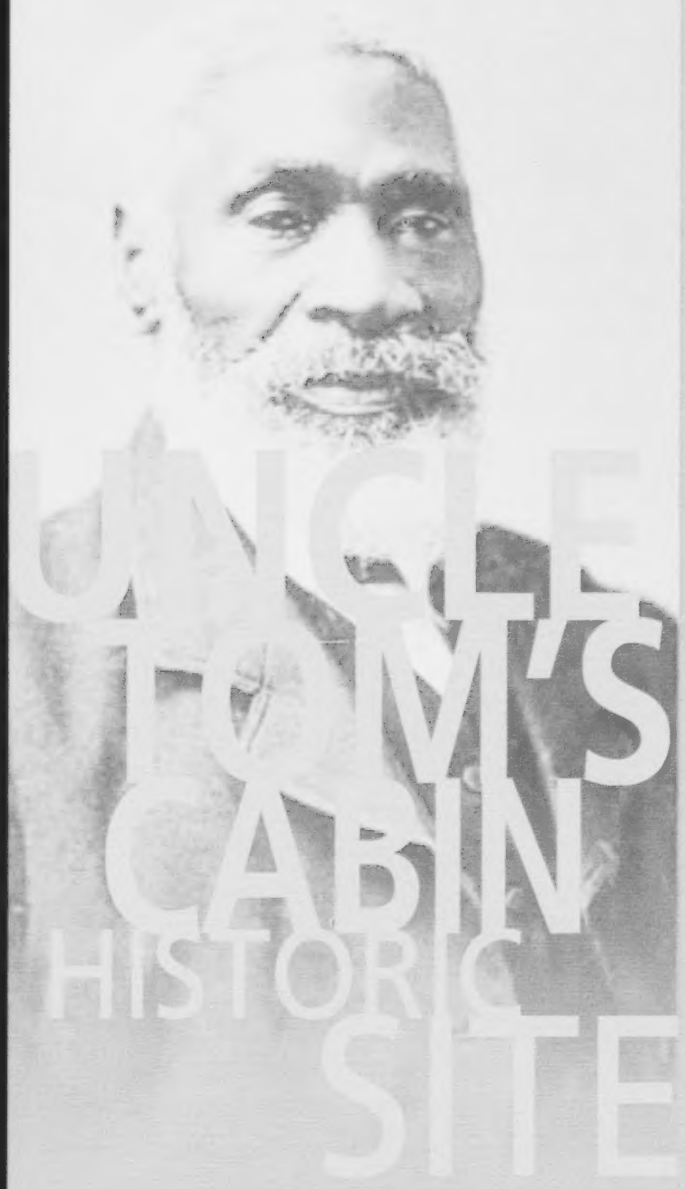
www.heritagetrust.on.ca/slaverytofreedom

Developed by the Ontario Heritage Trust, this web resource promotes Ontario's Black heritage sites and groups, and provides online information and resources, with a central focus on the province's rich Black history.

United Nations
www.un.org/en/events/iypad2011/index.shtml

Official United Nations website commemorating the International Year for People of African Descent.

Join the discussion and search for Ontario's Black heritage on Facebook.



Visit Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site and discover the achievements of Josiah Henson (Uncle Tom) through interactive exhibits, period artifacts and an interpretive video. Henson's dramatic escape from American slavery sets the background for your discovery of the trials and triumphs of freedom seekers on Canadian soil.

29251 Uncle Tom's Road, Dresden, Ontario
519-683-2978
www.uncletomscabin.org
utchs@heritagetrust.on.ca

Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site is owned and operated by the Ontario Heritage Trust.

UNCLE TOM'S CABIN HISTORIC SITE since 1850 DRESDEN ONTARIO

ONTARIO HERITAGE TRUST
An agency of the Government of Ontario

Join the discussion and search for Ontario's Black Heritage on Facebook.